

The Harriet Gladman Embroidery at the Priest House, West Hoathly

By Geoffrey Barber
with acknowledgment to the custodian Antony Smith for his assistance

The Harriet Gladman embroidery is part of the Sussex Archaeological Society's collection and is on display in the Priest House at West Hoathly. As well as being of interest to textile historians it is a historical document, telling the story of a young woman's marriage, the loss of a firstborn child and the comfort she found in religion. It is ever more poignant as it was probably used for the child's short 9 weeks of life.

The article would be accurately described as an embroidered child's bed cover or patchwork quilt (Fig. 1) and events embroidered on it suggest that it was made between 1838 and 1841. Its panels contain embroidered writing (cross-stitch) embellished by mostly heart shape motifs made either by applique applied with blanket stick, or simple backstitch. Other panels are unembroidered printed cotton fabric using three cotton prints some of which was used in the applique motifs. Overall the work has a charming naivety about it. Some of the plain panels on the periphery are devoid of writing suggesting that this was an ongoing work.

Harriet Farrant was born on 22 January 1812 (as documented in her embroidery) at Framfield, East Sussex. In 1839 she married Gideon Gladman at St Nicholas Church in Brighton. Gideon's father had died in 1835 leaving him £100 which appears to have put him in a position to establish himself as a farmer, and also to marry.¹

Harriet recorded their wedding on her embroidery, she was 27 years old and Gideon 25 years:

I Harriet Farrant was united to Gideon Gladman at Brighton Church Monday April the 15th in the year of our Lord 1839".

*"O Lord grant that we together may sweetly live
And when it shall please thee to call us to die
Grant we may each a starry crown receive
And reign above the sky.*

Harriet was a first cousin to her husband's mother Mary whose own mother was Mary Farrant (1751-1793). This may be an important factor in explaining the survival of the bed cover as Gideon's mother is the person most likely responsible for taking it to West Sussex where it ultimately ended up in the Priest House at West Hoathly.

In the 1841 census for Laughton, Gideon and Harriet Gladman were living at Terrible Down near Halland in East Sussex.² We also find Gideon's mother Mary Gladman and his married sister Mary Taylor and her family living nearby. So, in 1841 Harriet was clearly a part of a close family.

Harriet's embroidery records the birth of their first child, daughter Harriet Farrant Gladman:

Harriet Farrant Gladman daughter of Gideon and Harriet Gladman was born Monday November the 16th in the after noon at four oclock in the year of Our Lord 1840

¹ Will of Gideon Gladman of Framfield, Sussex, England, pr. 12 Jun 1835 (TNA: PROB 11/1848/82).

² 1841 Census for England, HO107/1118/7; Page: 7; Line: 1.



Fig. 1. The Harriet Gladman embroidered child's bed cover.

Sadly, it also records her death just 9 weeks and 3 days later:

Harriet Farrant Gladman daughter of Gideon and Harriet Gladman died Thursday night at half past ten o'clock January the 21 in the year of Our Lord 1841 aged 9 weeks and 3 days.

Their daughter's death certificate has no cause of death. She was buried on the 24 January 1841 at All Saint's Church at Laughton.^{3,4} It is clear from her embroidered words that Harriet took comfort from her religion and certainly did not fear her own death. However, her words and prayers reveal a great sense of loss. Progress on the embroidery appears to have ceased soon after this.

Harriet had two more children before she died on 18 December 1844, at the age of 32 years after just 5 years of marriage. Her cause of death was given as "cerebral disease".⁵

Gideon remarried a year later to the widow Caroline Stephens.⁶ They had two daughters Emily (1847) and Caroline (1848) before Caroline died in 1848 at the age of 37 years. She was buried on 16 Dec 1848 at All Saints, Laughton on the same day as her daughter Caroline was baptised, suggesting a birth related death.⁷

Gideon's mother Mary is probably the person most responsible for the survival of the embroidery. The 1851 census shows Mary living with Gideon and the children after both Harriet and the second wife Caroline had died, so she must have always been there to help Gideon as required. Mary would have valued the bed cover, especially as Harriet was her cousin, and probably stored it with her possessions at one point, perhaps after the children grew too big for it.

By 1861 Mary had moved to Horsted Keynes to live with her daughter Mary Taylor's family. She died there in 1870, age 91 years. Mary's personal possessions probably went to her daughter who died an accidental death in 1883.

Gideon had moved to Lingfield in Surrey and then later to East Grinstead. He married for a third time in 1879 to Mary Ann Savill at East Grinstead.⁸ He died there in 1894 age 80 years.⁹ His widow lived the rest of her days at Sackville College, an alms-house in East Grinstead.

If the bed cover had been retained by Gideon (and not his mother), then his personal effects would probably have been left to his last (third) wife Mary Ann. Her estate was probated on 23 Mar 1918 at London, England and valued at £143 1s 10d. Probate was granted to Charles Taylor, gentleman, who is thought to be Mary Taylor's grandson, the son of Charles Taylor and Mary Jane Baker.¹⁰ So either way, there is a good chance that the embroidery ended up with the Taylor family in Horsted Keynes.

Unfortunately, the SAS has no information on how the article was acquired. However, with the Priest House in West Hoathly only four miles away it did not have to travel far!

³ Death certificate of Harriet Farrant Gladman, died 21 Jan 1841, reg. 22 Jan 1841, Hailsham (GRO Ref: Vol 07 Page 267).

⁴ Index to Sussex Burials, SFHG.

⁵ Death certificate of Harriet Gladman, died 18 Dec 1844, reg. 19 Dec 1844, Hailsham (GRO Ref: Vol 7 Page 270).

⁶ Marriage certificate of Gideon Gladman and Caroline Stephens, 10 Feb 1846, Hailsham (GRO Ref: Vol 7 Page 469).

⁷ Index to Sussex Burials, SFHG.

⁸ GRO Indexes to Marriages, Jan-Mar 1879, East Grinstead, Vol 2b Page 168.

⁹ GRO Indexes to Deaths, Apr-Jun 1894, East Grinstead, Vol 2b Page 80, age 80 years.

¹⁰ National Probate Calendar, England & Wales.